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ABSTRACT

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, the counselor role moved substantially from one that focused primarily on remediation to one that focused on prevention. This chapter discusses the possible move toward a third role shift focusing on a developmental framework. The shift to this developmental focus rests on the premise that counselors need to provide emotional and social support so that all children succeed. The community involvement model for developmental guidance is included as a model for mobilizing a community effort to meet the developmental needs of children. The role changes necessary for schools and school counselors based on this model are highlighted. (GCP)

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Counselors and the Community

By

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Chapter Five

Counselors and the Community

Ron Anderson

Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, the counselor role moved substantially from one that focused primarily on remediation (kids struggling) to one that focused on prevention (kids at risk of struggling). While some talk has occurred about a third role shift to a developmental focus, movement toward this framework has been limited. The shift to a developmental perspective rests on the premise that we need to provide emotional and social support so that all children succeed. Counselors have been constantly fighting the battle of what to do with children who need serious and significant help to succeed at school.

The other factor negatively affecting a movement to a developmental framework is the scope of the task. How can we really affect the total development of a child? Although schools clearly have an impact on children, many other factors also come into play. Clearly, if counselors and schools are going to have this expanded impact, new roles and structures will have to be created, tested, and promoted. In this chapter, the community involvement model for developmental guidance is offered for consideration, using data from the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets to present a model of mobilizing a community effort to meet the developmental needs of children (Benson, 1997). The model includes role changes for schools and school counselors.

One national movement that addresses development is character education. Character education programs have mushroomed across the country and "fill the void" of academics only. "To educate a total individual, we need to educate the mind and the morals" is the rationale often given for the establishment of character education programs. A closer look at character education reveals a striking similarity to developmental guidance programs. The goal of character education is to help children

develop the social and emotional skills to get along and to be successful in the world. Some character education initiatives stress the importance of the community. After all, where does character (social skills, emotional health) come from? To assume that schools can be primarily responsible for this development is to ignore the obvious—character and social skills develop within families and communities in diverse and complex ways. Although some communities have taken on an expanded role in the planned development of character and social skills, most have not. What if schools and counselors resisted the temptation to take this role on for all children and parents who "struggle" and looked instead to how they could assist the community in expanding its role to help children develop into healthy, responsible citizens?

A model for mobilizing communities to meet developmental needs has been developed and implemented in more than 900 communities under the Healthy Communities/ Healthy Youth initiative of the Search Institute (Benson, 1997). Beginning with the premise that there are 40 research-based, key internal and external factors that support healthy development, the Search Institute has endeavored to measure these factors (called assets). By correlating them with thriving and risk-taking behavior, the Search Institute has laid a solid foundation for assessing the developmental needs of the children in a community. Table 1 shows the 1997 national sample of results from student responses to the Search Institute survey regarding external assets. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the correlation of assets (or lack thereof) with risk-taking behavior.

The 40 assets show a strong resemblance to a guidance-program set of goals and objectives. The external assets of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time represent outcomes counselors seek for students in different ways.

For example, when counselors start a peer helper program, they are building the following assets: (The numbers refer to the number of the asset from the larger group of 40.)

5. (caring school climate),
7. (community values youth),
8. (youth as resources),
9. (service to others), and
15. (positive peer influence).

Table 1: External Assets

Percent of Your Youth Reporting Each of 20 External Assets			
Asset Type	**Asset Name**	**Definition**	**Percent**
Support	1. Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.	76
	2. Positive family communication	Young person and his or her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s') advice and counsel.	37
	3. Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults.	51
	4. Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.	47
	5. Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.	34
	6. Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.	37
Empowerment	7. Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.	32
	8. Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.	33
	9. Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.	54
	10. Safety	Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.	51
Boundaries and Expectations	11. Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences. and monitors the young person's whereabouts.	54
	12. School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.	60
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.	52
	14. Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	37
	15. Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior	73
	16. High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.	55
Constructive Use of Time	17. Creative activities	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theatre or other arts.	24
	18. Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs. or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.	58
	19. Religious community	Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.	70
	20. Time at home	Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.	59

When counselors speak to parents at a PTA meeting about listening skills or discipline practices, they are building these assets:

1. (family support),
2. (positive family communication), and
11. (family boundaries).

The internal assets identified by the Search Institute (see Table 2) are related to developmental tasks that counselors seek in their programs. These are the skills, competencies, and values that children need in order to be successful and healthy individuals.

For example, when counselors teach lessons on handling anger, they help students develop the following assets:

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32. (planning and decision making),
33. (interpersonal competence), and
36. (peaceful conflict resolution).

Table 2: Internal Assets

Percent of Your Youth Reporting Each of 20 Internal Assets			
Asset Type	**Asset Name**	**Definition**	**Percent**
Commitment to Learning	21. Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.	74
	22. School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.	61
	23. Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.	68
	24. Bonding to school	Young person cares about his or her school.	54
	25. Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.	24
Positive Values	26. Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.	55
	27. Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.	56
	28. Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.	69
	29. Honesty	Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.	70
	30. Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.	64
	31. Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	56
Social Competencies	32. Planning and decision-making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.	31
	33. Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.	51
	34. Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.	47
	35. Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.	48
Positive Identity	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.	50
	37. Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."	49
	38. Self-esteem	Young person reports having a high self-esteem.	58
	39. Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."	65
	40. Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about his or her personal future.	76

When counselors help students evaluate the results of a career interest survey, they are helping students develop these assets:

39. (sense of purpose) and
40. (positive view of personal future).

The 40 assets represent a comprehensive framework that correlates successfully with most guidance objectives. As counselors help structure the environment of students to build assets, they focus on healthy development and associated behaviors, such as school success. When the Search Institute correlated self-reported student assets with risk-taking behavior, they found strong and dramatic connections (see Figures 1, 2,

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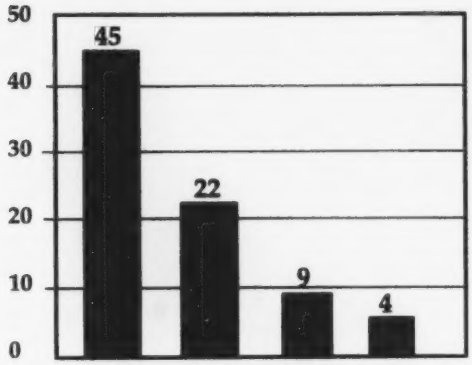
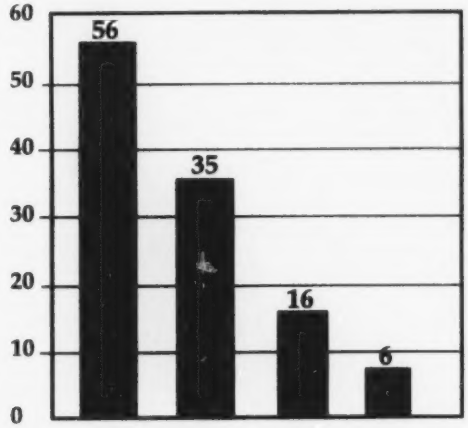
Figure 1: School Problems



Skipped school two or more days in last 4 weeks and/or has below C average

ASSETS PROTECT CHLDREN BY HELPING THEM SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

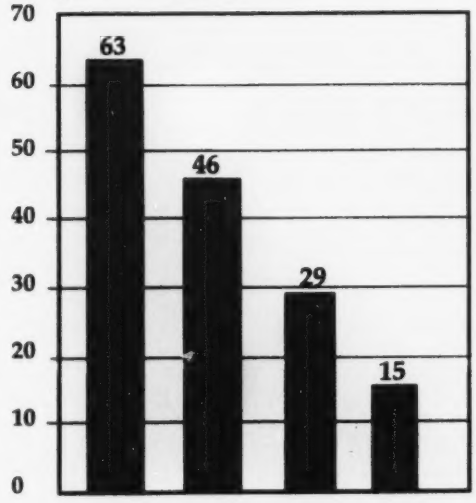
Figure 2: Use of Alcohol



Used alcohol once or more in last 30 days

ASSETS PROTECT CHLDREN FROM ALCOHOL USE

Figure 3: Violence



Hit someone one or more times in last 12 months

ASSETS PROTECT CHLDREN FROM VIOLENT ACTS

and 3).

Whereas the 40 developmental assets model lays out a strong rationale for a developmental guidance program, the Search Institute has taken this information to the community-organizing level. In his book *All Kids Are Our Kids*, Peter Benson (1997), president of the Search Institute, has detailed a plan for communities to rebuild their developmental infrastructure for children. It is Dr. Benson's contention that the entire community must become engaged to raise the average number of assets in the children in that community. In more than 900 communities that have embraced the Search Institute's asset model, efforts are being made to get adults to interact with children and youth in new, asset-building ways.

Increasing intergenerational relations is at the heart of asset building. Children learn from adults and grow from the caring, supportive relations they have with them. In many ways this is what counselors do with students with whom they work. A good counselor helps a student through their relationship. This relationship is special and powerful. The more of these asset-building relationships a student has, the more likely he or she is to succeed in school and other areas of life. Many counselors have used this information to mobilize other adults in their schools to build relationships that build assets. Such guidance programs as advising, academic coaching, mentoring, and career shadowing all use the intergenerational model. Counselors who have chosen to organize their programs in this manner have had a greater effect on students than those offering traditional individual and small group counseling. Just as classroom guidance reached more students than previous methods did, developing intergenerational support structures at school has reached even more students in meaningful ways. Most schools with successful adviser-advisee programs also see better academic performance because of the correlation between assets and student performance. A child who has an adult (in this case an adviser) who cares, takes time, and builds assets is at strong "risk" of success.

Benson and the communities that used the asset approach found that the greatest impact assets can have on children lies in the community as a whole. When parents, neighbors, civic and religious leaders, employers, police, human service staff, and the general public collaborate to build assets, the potential for large-scale change is powerful. Their efforts generally center on community awareness about the developmental nature of

assets and their power to protect students from risk-taking behavior. While many counselors could see this activity as well beyond their scope or abilities, others have embraced the idea of a guidance program that helps children grow in healthy ways and also leads to academic success through community engagement.

In Wake County, North Carolina, counselors are taking a leadership role in this movement and transforming their guidance programs. By being partly focused on the community, these programs reach more students than traditional approaches do. A community-based guidance program could have some of the following features:

Parental involvement and education: As parents are the first and most important asset builders in a child's life, counselors could reach out to PTAs to educate parents about their influence on the 40 assets. Through presentations, workshops, and newsletters, parents' involvement and education would be a key to success. Even unusual outreach efforts to involve parents who are traditionally hard to reach can be employed.

Community involvement and education: To build assets in communities and neighborhoods, counselors could speak to civic and neighborhood groups about the power of building developmental assets. When neighbors agree to "look out" for each other's children, children feel safer and learn that community has some degree of consensus about what is acceptable and expected. The community could also reward service, effort, and resistance to risk taking. Such a supportive community would surround all children with both opportunities and safe alternatives. An example of this occurs each year as the graduates of Raleigh schools attend a gala graduation party that is alcohol and drug free.

Emphasis on life skills: To protect children from harm, counselors could work closely with community and religious groups to emphasize "life skills" that are asset based (decision making, anger and behavior control, socialization, helping others, and so forth). Such groups as YMCA, recreation programs, camping programs, community sports programs, scouting programs, boys' and girls' clubs, youth groups in religious institutions, and many other groups that serve youth are working with counselors and community leaders to build assets by teaching life skills as well as providing supportive, nurturing environments.

Career development: In a community-based guidance

program, counselors and other educators could work closely with employers to advance career development for youth. The asset approach to career development focuses on more than job training, however; students would learn with community adults in a manner that fosters intergenerational sharing and nurturing. Career shadowing, career mentoring, and emphasizing the importance of life skills as outlined in the assets would also differentiate this approach from the minimal job-training approach. Counselors in Wake County are reaching out to employers to teach them about assets and to help them view themselves as asset builders.

Conclusion

Although the potential benefits of a community-based guidance program grounded in an assets approach are relatively clear, the challenges are significant. To get out of the traditional office and into the community is the biggest paradigm shift. Counselors and guidance-program designers can learn much from the Cities in Schools (CIS) programs that gained popularity and support during the 1990s. This outreach program utilizes school staff as community outreach workers. The CIS coordinators recruit mentors, talk to employers, and reach out to parents and others in the community to help students who or at risk of dropping out of school. The paradigm these coordinators have is one of connecting community members to at-risk youth. To accomplish this, they spend large amounts of time in the community. If counselors adopted this model, they would also go into the community to recruit and educate citizens. A guidance program that is community based would tie all support activities to school success in new and exciting ways. Counselors would gain new respect among students and peers for their work on behalf of all students. Whether recruiting study buddies or matching career mentors to students, counselors would be proactively altering the opportunities students have to increase the number of developmental assets in their lives. Those who question the sense of this new design need only refer back to Figures 1, 2, and 3.

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About the Author

Ron Anderson, Ph.D., is the current senior director of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant for Wake County Schools. Previously, he served as the director of guidance and social work for Wake County, a school system of 100,000 students. He is also adjunct professor in Counselor Education at North Carolina State University. Anderson has presented extensively on topics such as the 40 Developmental Asset Framework as a model for school counseling, accountability for school counselors, and play therapy. Dr. Anderson has been a school counselor in Gainesville, Florida, an assistant professor of Counselor Education at Northern Illinois University, and guidance consultant for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. a former president of the North Carolina Counseling Association, he is currently the chair of the Duke Endowment funded Building Youth Assets initiative in Raleigh, North Carolina.